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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATE 0025
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9680

S E C R E T RIYADH 001232

SIPDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO NEA/ARP FOR BMCGRATH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2018

TAGS: PREL ASEC CASC EAID MR SA

SUBJECT: SAUDI OFFICIAL DISCUSSES MAURITANIA COUP, AID PACKAGE

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 00421

1B. MCGRATH E-MAIL DATED 8/8/08

Classified By: Charge' d'Affaires Michael Gfoeller
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. A Saudi MFA official, who is responsible for Arab League issues, confirms that the SAG condemns the Mauritania coup. While he did not have firm information on possible impact to the Saudi aid package for Mauritania, he did leave open the possibility that aid could be withheld.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) On August 10, Poloff met with Ambassador Talal al-Malki of the Saudi MFA to discuss Mauritania. Al-Malki confirmed that the SAG, like the U.S., condemns the coup. He explained that the SAG follows the lead of the Arab League - if the Arab League condemns, the SAG condemns. Al-Malki said he would have to verify if there were any specific SAG plans to interrupt the aid program for Mauritania. It's possible there is scheduled aid that could be impacted, or that all promised aid has already been disbursed. He stated that the SAG would also follow the Arab League's lead when it comes to suspension of aid - if the Arab League suspends aid, the Saudis will follow. At the same time, he emphasized that the Saudis would be cognizant of the U.S. position. If the Arab League decides to maintain aid, but the U.S. suspends aid, they will have to choose between the two paths.

¶3. (S) Al-Malki said the ideal situation is for the Arab League to negotiate an agreement with the junta that makes the cessation of aid unnecessary. However, Al-Malki voiced serious doubts regarding President Abdullahi's chances of returning to the Mauritanian presidency. He mentioned that President Abdullahi was not able to handle the military, unlike, for example, President Bouteflika of Algeria, who is able to get the military to "roll over on its back" and do as he pleases.

¶4. (S) COMMENT: Al-Malki repeated several times his doubts about President Abdullahi's return. Unstated was the hope that a breakthrough in the situation would give the Saudis an escape on making a difficult decision regarding aid. Meanwhile, Mauritania has been a front page story in Saudi press. The lead editorial in the Aug 8 edition of the English-language Arab News harshly criticized the coup and supported the idea of withholding aid. The editorial recommends "coming down hard on the generals now, before any aid bans take effect." Post will stay in contact with MFA on the Saudis' plans for aid to Mauritania, and report as appropriate. END COMMENT

GFOELLER